

# **HEALTH CARE**

## **NEWS AND INFORMATION**

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Volume 14 Number 38

November 9, 2007

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*Health Care: News and Information* is a service of the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) to help our readers stay fully informed about the latest health care issues as we work to advance a high-quality health care system.

Jim Edwards, Editor

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## **HLC Urges National Privacy Standard**

**If the United States is to implement a successful national health information infrastructure, adopting a national standard governing patient records is critical.**

- The leading cross-sectoral coalition, the Healthcare Leadership Council, reiterated this central insight recently, this time to the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics.
- HLC has long led an effort to ensure proper patient records confidentiality. The Confidentiality Coalition, which HLC heads, includes more than 100 organizations that represent health care providers, employers and patients.
- NCVHS's Ad Hoc Workgroup for Secondary Uses of Health Data invited input from stakeholders, including HLC. The committee will issue a report soon.

**State medical privacy laws vary widely. This patchwork of standards will pose a barrier to a workable national health information infrastructure.**

- Everyone agrees that a successful national health information network will require common technical standards of interoperability. In the same way, a uniform privacy standard is necessary for a national IT system for health care.
- The answer? A workable, federal standard to preserve patient records confidentiality.
- It's hard enough for health care entities to comply with all the different standards governing patient records privacy in the various states in which they operate – in a largely paper-based environment. It would be well-nigh impossible to do so in a national electronic environment.

**A workable federal standard has been in force for several years now. It could fit the bill for a national health information network if it superseded all the state medical privacy laws.**

- The federal standard was crafted in the implementation of the HIPAA law. The HIPAA privacy standard strikes an appropriate balance. It protects the sanctity of a patient's medical information while ensuring that necessary information is available for providing quality health care and conducting vital medical research.

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- A national e-health infrastructure should build upon the HIPAA standards to meet emerging

privacy issues. And these standards should preempt state privacy laws governing health care.

- The HIPAA privacy rule protects patient record confidentiality. It also enables health professionals to appropriately share patient information for treatment, research and operations.

**A nationwide health IT system requires a nationwide, uniform set of standards. This includes patient privacy standards. And, as the HIPAA privacy rule has proven, those standards must appropriately balance patient privacy and medical information flow. While the HIPAA rules could use some improvement, the danger of competing varied – or even starker – standards would risk bringing the health care system to a standstill. Overly burdensome, heavyhanded privacy standards would kill the HIT network baby in the crib. Patients would lose the most. And patients would gain the most from uniform national standards that enable high-quality health care delivery and research.**

*The Healthcare Leadership Council, representing the innovators in each sector of the health care industry, is committed to advancing a market-based health care system that values innovation and provides affordable, high-quality care.*

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